1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

The royal houses of Nupe, like every nobleman's house, had their first 567
of slaves: slaves for menial work—in the house and on the land—as well 644
as the titled slaves of respected position. At the court this latter group of 555
slaves formed the *ena wuši*, the Order of Court Slaves, a distinguished slave *élite* into which only few selected slaves could ever hope to be admitted. From the slaves captured in war those of high birth and status, chiefs or distinguished warriors, were selected for the court. These, too, were given ranks and titles, and could rise high in the service of the king. Theirs was the specialized service of officials and trusted royal agents. There were those who looked after the king's vast household; those who were in charge of the *Etsu* Nupe's no less imposing [839] ●
harem—both offices formerly entrusted to eunuchs.[1] Other slaves formed the king's bodyguard and police force; they were provincial delegates, tax collectors, trusted messengers, 'liaison officers' between the king's palace and the houses of his noblemen, and between the king and the army in the field. These slaves, like the other rank-holders, owned land and held fiefs. The Nupe kings in Rabá are said to have had only four titled court slaves; the slave ranks that existed at the court of Bida some thirty years ago (and the ranks still exist, although their holders are no longer slaves) were more than three times that number. Under *Etsu* Maliki, one of the last independent kings of Nupe, the most responsible state offices were taken from royal princes and *sarakiži* and entrusted to slaves. The position of the slaves as officers of state thus seems to have overshadowed more and more all other state ranks. Slave ranks were ranks bestowed *ad personam*, and ranks bestowed by the king personally, independent of the council of princes and ministers; and this gives us the explanation for their rise in importance. The offices linked with civil and military rank also depended to some extent on the personal favour of the king. But once appointed, these men stayed on, servants of the kingdom rather than of the king. They had behind them the claims of powerful families, they were exponents of political factions, and could play on that 'balance of power' between the dynasties. The slaves were personal servants in the full sense of the word. They were brought into office, not by family claims or promotion or a rigid rule of succession, but by personal appointment, selection, and trial. They were bound to the king's service generation after generation, by the strongest bond: their position of unfree men. It frequently happened that a new *Etsu* took over the slaves who had served his predecessor and left them their ranks and possessions. The rise of the slave officials at the Fulani court is the counterpart of the rise of a powerful, dangerously independent feudal nobility.

The following is a list of slave ranks held to-day, not by slaves, but by 567
former slaves or descendants of slaves at the court of the *Etsu* Nupe. I 554
have again tried to indicate in what manner they received their title, and also in certain cases the office which some of them are holding to-day in the Bida Town Administration. That so many of these former slaves

[1] In the pre-Fulani kingdom the court is said to have employed only a few slaves—all eunuchs. All slave ranks which have a *nda* in their title, meaning 'father' (ranks that are still in use—see attached chart), were originally ranks reserved for eunuchs.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
: FF52 Nupe FF52

risk of divorce or even of their husbands' serious anger. The ritual alone seriously and publicly brands immorality or subjects barren women to a 'cure' which is indistinguishable from punishment.

Thirdly, the hectic mood of the *gunnu* dance is a model 'in reverse'. For this kind of abandoned behaviour is never permitted or thought of in ordinary life, and any open reference to sex is severely shunned by the rather prudish Nupe. Sex and privacy go together; and no ordinary dance permits a mingling of the sexes. Indeed, in all ordinary dances and in most ceremonial ones the whole mood is one of calm and restraint. Perhaps, then, we may call the *gunnu* (and one or two similar ceremonials) a safety-valve, a licensed compensation for otherwise rigid self-control; certainly, it puts a premium on a mode of behaviour otherwise not only improper but unthinkable.

The final instance, again taken from the *gunnu*, is of a slightly different order. I am referring to the masquerading of the boys as girls. 'Masquerading' is possibly too strong a word, for all that happens is that the boys wear a piece of woman's cloth.[1] But this aspect of the *gunnu* dress is always specifically mentioned, and in the general dance the boys are encouraged to imitate and caricature female steps and mannerisms. Now in 'real' life boys or men are never expected to behave like the opposite sex. From the time when children put on any dress at all (when they are about six or seven), they are dressed differently. As soon as the boys form themselves into the earliest age grade (at the age of eight or nine), the occupations, interests, and codes of conduct of the sexes differ sharply, and this is true also of songs, dances, and pastimes of all kinds. Male homosexuality, which would blur this dividing line, is severely condemned and, in fact, denied to occur. The exceptional behaviour at the *gunnu* thus appears to have a symbolic significance (though it is not stated more explicitly), the temporary change of roles pointing to a more permanent one. The boys who are admitted to the *gunnu* are on the threshold of manhood, the very admission to the ritual being a first token of the new status. Before that they were something else—children, still looked after by their mothers as much as by their fathers, and being with women more often than with men. Later, this ambiguous position will come to an end, which change roughly coincides with admission to the *gunnu*. The symbolic identification with the female sex on that occasion thus emphasizes the transition through concentrating it into something like 'a last time' when boys can be confused with girls. It is not literally a 'last time'; for even before this event boys did not walk about dressed like girls or behaved

[1] In the *gani* ceremonial, to be described later, this 'masquerading' is much more elaborate and definite (see below, p. 218).